

Bird Banding

by

Louis G. Flentge



THE CHICAGO ACADEMY OF SCIENCES

LINCOLN PARK - CHICAGO

Bird Banding

Louis G. FLENTGE

Bird banding in America was first accomplished by Audubon, who, in 1803, tied silver threads around the legs of young phoebes and was rewarded the following season by having two of the marked birds return to nest in the same vicinity.

In the following years, investigators marked birds in many ways but none seemed to be as suitable as the placing of an aluminum band around the tarsus. Various mutilations of feathers, feet, or bill, as well as the staining or dyeing of flight feathers were attempted, but did not prove satisfactory. In 1909, the American Bird Banding Association was organized in New York City. Banding work was carried on by this organization until it outgrew its resources and, in January, 1920, was taken over by the United States Bureau of Biological Survey now the Fish and Wildlife Service of the Department of the Interior.

The banding of fledglings as well as systematic trapping and banding of adult birds is now carried on throughout the United States by about 2,300 volunteer cooperators who band approximately 450,000 birds each year. Over 3,500,000 birds have been banded in the twenty years in which banding has been under the direction of the Survey.

The banding of birds is of definite scientific value. Great volumes of information relative to the life histories of our American birds are garnered from the reports of the bird banders. Such data as the lines of migration of individual species of birds, as well as the speed of travel, distribution, length of life, and homing instinct, are readily available from banding records. The seasonal distribution of game birds presents a real problem for law-making bodies in the establishment of game laws. Reports submitted by bird handers are of great value in the limitation of hunting seasons and size of bag.

Traps of every description are employed in bird banding work ; from the drop trap which is nothing more than a variation of a box propped up on a stick with a cord running to the watcher, to delicate contrivances designed to lure the tiny warblers out of the treetops as they pass through in migration. At least a few individuals of each species are banded nearly every year, while some species are banded in large numbers. In the fiscal year, ended June 30, 1939, chimney swifts headed the list with 71.623 banded individuals. Cooperators in the Chicago Region band many birds each year, and many of them return to the place of banding year after year. Others never return to the banding station and may be taken in one of the neighboring states, in Canada, Mexico or Central America.

There are many interesting records of birds banded in this area that have been recaptured, shot, or found dead at some later date. The large number of interesting recoveries would fill several volumes ; therefore, it is impossible to mention here more than just a few.

Ruddy turnstone (A217098) banded at Zion, Illinois, September 4, 1929 ; shot at Bayou Scofield, Louisiana, October 10, 1929.

Spotted sandpiper (A134132) banded at Zion, Illinois, August 23, 1929 ; found and released at Raleigh, North Carolina, September 27, 1929.

Blue jay (A346309) banded at Hubbard Woods, Illinois, May 13, 1930; found dead February 24, 1931, at Bluevale, Huron County, Ontario.

Bohemian waxwing (B 153871) banded March 25, 1932, at Waukegan, Illinois ; captured April 25, 1932, at Craik, Saskatchewan.

Starling (38-218285) banded at Chicago, Illinois, February 13, 1938 ; retaken at the place of banding January 29, 1939. It was shipped by express to Hillsdale, Indiana, and released there on January 30, 1939. It was again retaken at Chicago, Illinois, on March 5, 1939, having returned from Hillsdale to its favorite roost.

Starling (38-218376) banded at Chicago, Illinois, February 13, 1938 ; retaken at the place of banding January 29, 1939. It was reported again from Dallas, Texas, December 28, 1939.

Chimney swift (37-91971) banded at Highland Park, Illinois, August 20, 1939 ; retrapped at Clarksville, Tennessee, on August 27, 1939. This bird covered an airline distance of 385 miles in seven days.

Any person who finds a banded bird is urged to notify the Fish and Wildlife Service, U. S. Department of the Interior, Washington, D. C. If the bird is dead, the band should be removed and sent along with any available information such as the date found, cause of death, species and locality. If the bird is captured alive, the band number should be noted along with whatever information is available and a note sent to the Department. Never remove the band from a live bird. Simply record the number very carefully and release the bird at once. Another record may come from this bird that will result in data of scientific importance. Anyone reporting a bird to the Department will be notified of the time and place of banding. The bird-banding cooperators and the Fish and Wildlife Service sincerely appreciate the interest and helpfulness of persons who send in accurate reports.

Reprinted from
The CHICAGO NATURALIST
Vol. 4, No. 2, 1941, pages 46-47.